

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE		
DATE:	10 NOVEMBER 2022	AGENDA ITEM:	
TITLE:	PETITION UPDATE - PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE USE OF KINGS ROAD & DUKE STREET BUS LANES		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	TONY PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	CLIMATE STRATEGY AND TRANSPORT
SERVICE:	HIGHWAYS & TRAFFIC SERVICES	WARDS:	ABBEY, KATESGROVE, PARK, REDLANDS, THAMES
LEAD OFFICER:	JAMES PENMAN	TEL:	0118 937 2202
JOB TITLE:	NETWORK SERVICES MANAGER	E-MAIL:	NETWORK.MANAGEMENT@READING.GOV.UK

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To provide an update to the petition reported at September 2022 Traffic Management Sub-Committee, following the receipt of further information from the lead petitioner. The petition requested private hire vehicle access to the Kings Road (outbound) bus lane and the Duke Street bus gate to access London Street. The petition contained 187 indications of support.
- 1.2 The report recommends against pursuing this change to the access exemptions in these bus lanes at this time and sets out the reasons for this. It recommends that consideration of bus lane access be undertaken as part of a future strategic (holistic) evaluation, in the context of local and national strategic priorities and policy, including the Local Transport Plan, Bus Service Improvement Plan and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Sub-Committee notes the content of this report.
- 2.2 That the requested alterations to increase access to the bus lanes are not pursued at this time.
- 2.3 That a future strategic piece of work is undertaken to consider current and potential alterations across the bus lane network within Reading. While not yet programmed, this would likely be reported initially through Strategic Environment Planning & Transport Committee and/or Policy Committee.

- 2.3 That the lead petitioner be informed of the decisions of the Sub-Committee, following publication of the agreed minutes of the meeting.
- 2.4 That no public inquiry be held into the proposals.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The request needs to be considered in the context of the Council's Local Transport Plan (LTP), Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), Climate Emergency Strategy and Health and Wellbeing Strategy by removing barriers to the greater use of sustainable, healthy transport options.

4. THE PROPOSAL

Current Position

- 4.1 As reported to September 2022 Traffic Management Sub-Committee, on 1st July 2022 a petition was submitted to the Council containing 187 indications of support. The petition stated the following:

Application for usage of the Bus Lane (KINGS ROAD, READING - OUTBOUND) and (DUKE STREET TO ACCESS LONDON STREET, INBOUND/OUTBOUND) READING.

I am writing this to request kindly the usage of the following bus lanes as stated above. I myself and likewise most of the PRIVATE HIRE DRIVERS in Reading have been driving Private Hire for many years.

Over the years the traffic situation in Reading has got from bad to worse. Day by day it is making our job very difficult and challenging. Especially in the Peak times the roads are so busy that we often get very late in dropping our passengers to their designated destinations.

On several occasions taking a V.I.P client to the airport in the mornings/afternoons we always get stranded on the A329 KINGS ROAD OUTBOUND. If we were granted access to use this bus lane it would help us in a logistical way, as you have been very kind to grant us the inbound usage of the same bus lane with barely any complaints of abusive use. As the same goes for the Duke Street bus lane access to London Street inbound/outbound, when we are trying to escort passengers to their destinations, it would be a major help, saving a great amount of time, meeting our customers' demands and needs and most of all reducing the amount of congestion and pollution.

Many thanks for taking the time to consider our request.

- 4.2 Following Septembers' Sub-Committee meeting, the Lead Petitioner provided further information to the Council, reporting the local challenges that exist regarding the challenges with educational establishments recruiting school transport drivers.

In addition to the lengthy application process, it is proposed that potential drivers are finding it unappealing to apply for the limited work that this

provides, particularly when these vehicles (in the context of them being private hire vehicles) are having to use general traffic lanes and contend with the traffic contained therein. It is suggested that allowing private hire access to these bus lanes will contribute to expedited journeys for school transport providers and make this work more appealing, thus improving the level of service.

It is further proposed that many bus lanes in the Borough are being used by Oxfordshire plated vehicles that have been licenced as Hackney Carriages, but are mostly undertaking executive industry work.

- 4.3 Buses play a key role in the efficient movement of people to, from and across the urban borough. They have been nationally identified as playing an important role in providing a more sustainable transport mode, managing congestion and improving air quality, compared with low-occupancy private vehicle use.

Bus lanes are important facilities in influencing a greater shift toward the use of this cleaner, more efficient transport mode by expediting bus journey times and improving journey time reliability.

Most of Reading's bus lanes additionally provide expedited and lower-trafficked routes that cyclists can use, should they choose to do so. This is not only a sustainable, clean and efficient mode of transport, but also has health benefits through exercise.

- 4.4 Some of Reading's bus lanes permit access by other vehicle types, such as motorcycles and taxis (including private-hire vehicles) and we are separately aware of requests for wider access by these vehicle types. Enabling a wider range of vehicle access to this infrastructure will increase the volumes of traffic using it and will inevitably have an impact on the effectiveness of the facility for its core purpose - expediting bus journey times. This also risks creating barriers to cycling by adding to the level of traffic.

It is important, therefore, that such recommendations for change are made holistically, appropriately and in line with local and national policies and strategies. It is an additional concern of officers that adding vehicles to the Kings Road outbound bus lane *may* risk additional contribution to casualty incidents along this street, as there will be a speed differential against general traffic lanes at busier times and the vehicles will be lower in profile compared to buses.

While relatively recent changes to the Kings Road inbound bus lane access have been referenced by the petitioner, it should be noted that the outcome of the changes was a reduction in access over the previous restriction.

- 4.5 Changes to access will require a change to the Traffic Regulation Order that underlays each restriction. This change would require a statutory consultation to be undertaken on the new draft order, advertising of the sealed Order thereafter and changes to the statutory signing. Back-office changes to the enforcement software would be required. These changes would require funding and resourcing.

Options Proposed

- 4.6 At this time, officers cannot recommend pursuing processes that could lead to the introduction of additional vehicles into these bus lanes, due to the impact that they will have on the effectiveness of the features.

It is recommended that bus lane access be holistically considered as part of future strategy work related to the LTP, BSIP and other policies of the Council. The outcomes will be reported to an appropriate Committee(s), such as Policy or SEPTc and may have outputs that will be reported back through Traffic Management Sub-Committee.

Other Options Considered

- 4.7 It could be agreed that the change of access to these bus lanes be pursued. The processes outlined in Item 4.5 would need to be followed.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 This proposal contributes to the Council's Corporate Plan Themes, as set out below:

Healthy environment

The recommendations of this report will enable consideration of the potential risks that increased traffic in these bus lanes will have on a desirable increase in active and public mass rapid transport modes and the health and environmental benefits that this shift can realise.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).
- 6.2 The proposal contained in this report proposes no change at this time, so a Climate Impact Assessment has not been considered necessary.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 The lead petitioner will be informed of the decision of the Sub-Committee regarding the request that they have made, following publication of the meeting minutes.

The lead petitioner will be informed of the Committee details where the officer recommendations will be reported in advance of that meeting taking place, to provide an opportunity for representation.

- 7.2 Meeting reports and minutes are published on the Council's website and Traffic Management Sub-Committee is a public meeting that can be attended. Recordings of the meetings are also available via the Council's website (www.reading.gov.uk).

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

8.2 The proposal contained in this report recommends no changes at this time and it is not considered that an Equality Impact Assessment is relevant as this proposal is not deemed to be discriminatory to persons with protected characteristics.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no foreseen legal implications relating to the recommendation of this report.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report are set out below:-

10.1 Revenue Implications

	2022/23 £000	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000
Employee costs	NIL	NIL	NIL
Other running costs			
Capital financings costs			
Expenditure	NIL	NIL	NIL
Income from:			
Fees and charges	NIL	NIL	NIL
Grant funding			
Other income			
Total Income	NIL	NIL	NIL
Net Cost(+)/saving (-)	NIL	NIL	NIL

10.2 Capital Implications

Capital Programme reference from budget book:	2022/23 £000	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000
Proposed Capital Expenditure	NIL	NIL	NIL
Funded by N/A	NIL	NIL	NIL
Total Funding	NIL	NIL	NIL

10.3 Value for Money (VFM)

Not applicable.

10.4 Risk Assessment.

There are no foreseeable financial risks associated with the recommendation of this report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 Petition Update - Private Hire Vehicle Use of Kings Road & Duke Street Bus Lanes